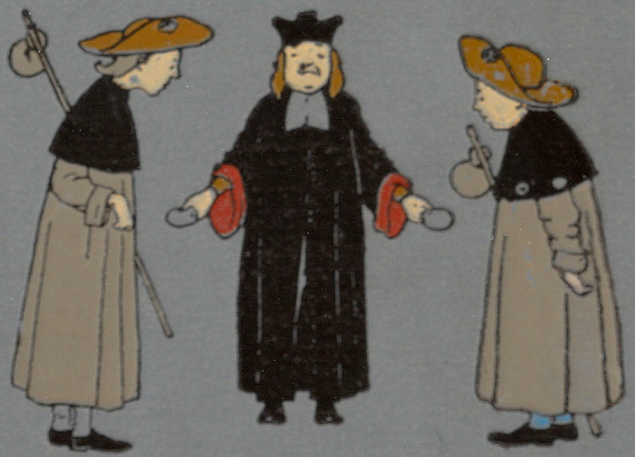
La Fontaine's Fables



Illustrated by

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LVCY·A·MORSE
QVID·VITA·SINE·LVCE·MORS

Constance Morse.
1897.

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SELECT FABLES

FROM

LA FONTAINE

ADAPTED FROM THE TRANSLATION OF ELIZUR WRIGHT

FOR THE USE OF THE YOUNG.

Illustrated by

M. B. DE MONVEL

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

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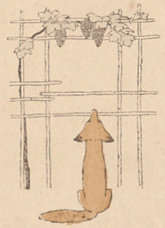

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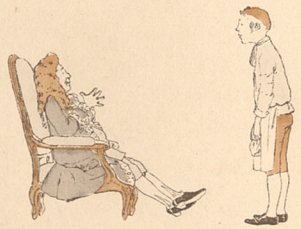

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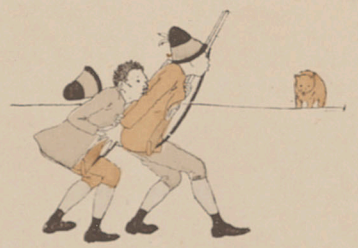

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The English text is adapted from a translation made by Elizur Wright some fifty years ago. The changes introduced into this translation are not many : a few more or less antiquated words and sentences have been modernised, and some of the " morals " have been omitted.

Editor, S. P. C. K.

PARIS. TYPOGRAPHIE DE E. PLON, NOURRIT ET Cie, RUE GARANCIÈRE, 8. — GRAVURES EN RELIEF DE CH. G. PETIT ET Cie. — ENCRES DE LA MAISON LORILLEUX ET Cie.

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT

A GRASSHOPPER gay
Sang the summer away,
And found herself poor
With winter at the door.
Of meat or of bread,
Not a morsel she had!

So a begging she went,
To her neighbour the ant,

For the loan of some wheat,
Which would serve her to eat,
Till the season came round.

'I will pay you,' she saith,
'On an animal's faith,
Double weight in the pound
Ere the harvest be bound.'

The ant is a friend
(And here she might mend)
Little given to lend.

'How spent you the summer?'
Quoth she, looking shame
At the borrowing dame.
'Night and day to each comer
I sang, if you please.'

For 'tis plain at a glance,
Now, ma'am, you must dance.'

BM.

THE RAVEN AND THE FOX

PERCH'D on a lofty oak,
Sir Raven held a lunch of cheese;

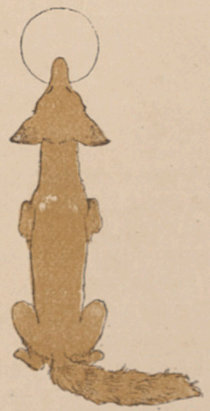
Sir Fox, who smelt it in the breeze,
Thus to the holder spoke :—

'Ha! how do you do, Sir Raven?
Well, your coat, sir, is a brave one!
So black and glossy, on my word, sir,

With voice to match, you were a bird, sir,
Well fit to be the Phœnix of these days.

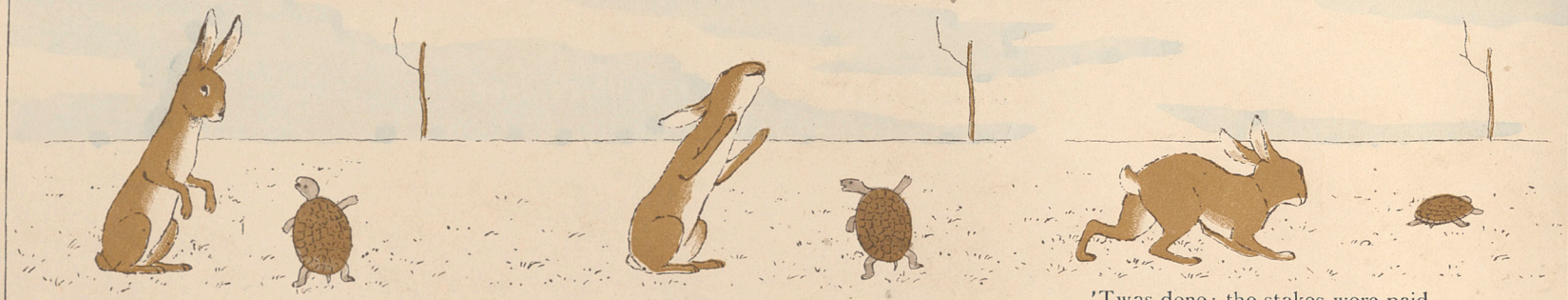
Sir Raven, upset with praise,
Must show how musical his croak.
Down fell the luncheon from the oak ;
Which snatching up, Sir Fox thus spoke :—

'The flatterer, my good sir,
Liveth upon his listener ;
Which lesson, if you please,
Is doubtless worth the cheese.'



A bit too late, Sir Raven swore ,
The rogue should never cheat him more.

THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE



To win a race, the swiftness of a dart
Availeth not without a timely start.
The hare and tortoise are my witnesses.
Said tortoise to the swiftest thing that is,
'I'll bet that you'll not reach so soon as I
The tree on yonder hill we spy.'

'So soon! Why, madam, are you frantic?'
Replied the creature, with an antic;
'Pray take, your senses to restore,
A grain or two of hellebore.'
'Say,' said the tortoise, 'what you will;
I dare you to the wager still.'

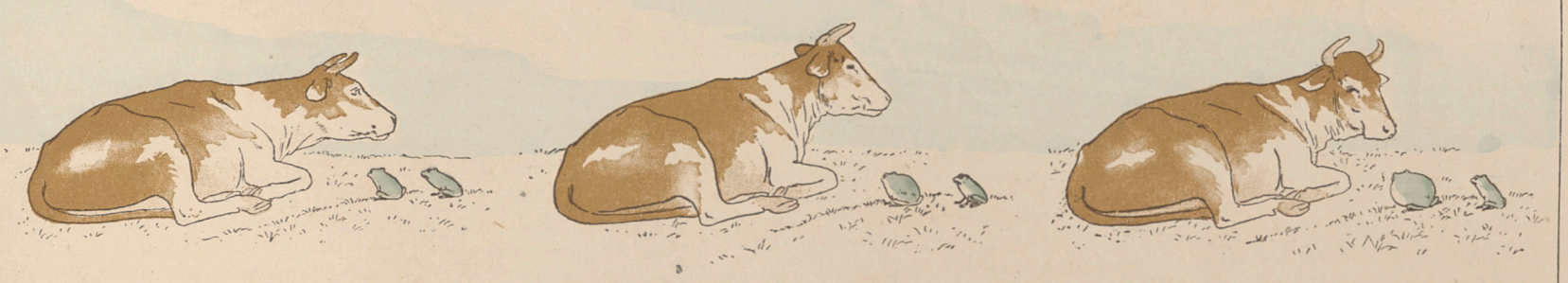
'Twas done; the stakes were paid,
And near the goal-tree laid—
Of what, is not a question for this place,
Nor who it was that judged the race.
Our hare had scarce five jumps to make,
Of such as he is wont to take,
When, starting just before their beaks
He leaves the hounds at leisure,
Thence till the kalends of the Greeks,
The sterile heath to measure.

Thus having time to browse and doze,
And list which way the zephyr blows,
He makes himself content to wait,
And let the tortoise go her gait
In solemn, senatorial state.

She starts; she moils on, modestly and lowly,
And with a prudent wisdom hastens slowly;
But he, meanwhile, the victory despises,
Thinks lightly of such prizes,
Believes it for his honour
To take late start and gain upon her.
So, feeding, sitting at his ease,
He meditates of what you please,

Till his antagonist he sees
Approach the goal; then starts,
Away like lightning darts:
But vainly does he run;
The race is by the tortoise won.
Cries she, 'My senses do I lack?
What boots your boasted swiftness now?
You're beat! and yet, you must allow,
I bore my house upon my back.'

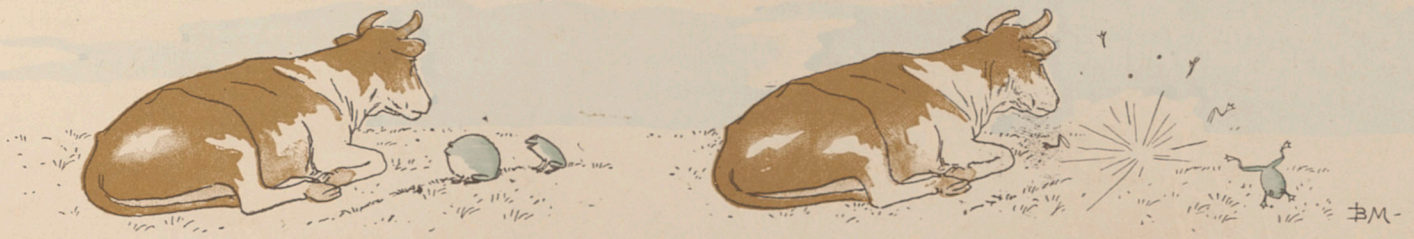
THE FROG THAT WISHED TO BE AS BIG AS THE OX



THE tenant of a bog,
An envious little frog,
Not bigger than an egg,

A stately bullock spies,
And, smitten with his size,
Attempts to be as big.

With earnestness and pains,
She stretches, swells, and strains,



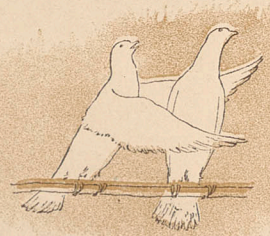
And says, 'Sir Frog, look here! see me!
Is this enough?' 'No, No.'

'Well, then, is, this? 'Poh! poh!
Enough! you don't begin to be.'
And thus the reptile sits,
Enlarging till she splits.

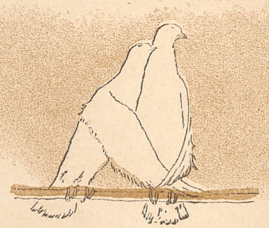
THE TWO DOVES

Two doves once cherished for each other
The love that brother hath for brother.
But one, of scenes domestic tiring,
To see the foreign world aspiring,
  Was fool enough to undertake
  A journey long, o'er land and lake.

'What plan is this?' the other cried;
'Wouldst quit so soon thy brother's side?
This absence is the worst of ills;
Thy heart may bear, but me it kills.



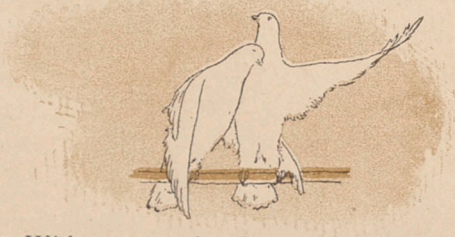
Pray, let the dangers, toil, and care,
  Of which all travellers tell,
Your courage somewhat quell.
Still if the season later were—
O wait the zephyrs!—hasten not—
  Just now the raven, on his oak,
  In hoarser tones than usual spoke.



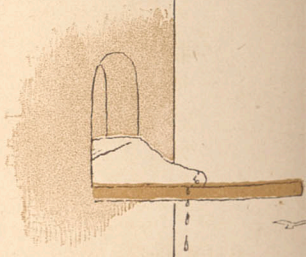
My heart forebodes the saddest lot,—
The falcons, net—Alas, it rains!
  My brother, are thy wants supplied—
  Provisions, shelter, pocket-guide,
And all that unto health pertains?'
These words occasion'd some demur
In our imprudent traveller.

But restless curiosity
Prevail'd at last; and so said he,—

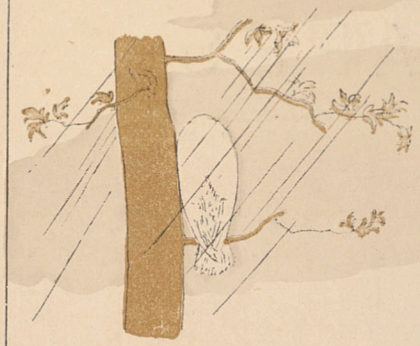
'The matter is not worth a sigh;
Three days, at most, will satisfy,
And then, returning, I shall tell
You all the wonders that befell,—



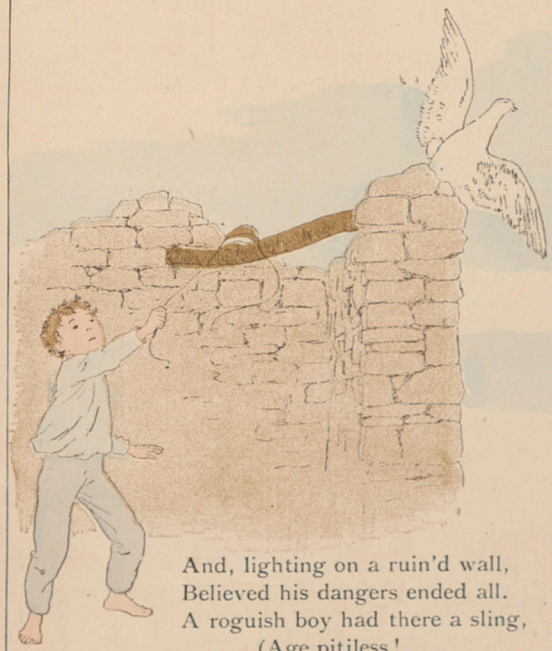
With scenes enchanting and sublime
Shall sweeten all our coming time.
Who seeth nought, hath nought to say.
My travel's course, from day to day,
Will be the source of great delight.
  A store of tales I shall relate,—
  Say there I lodged at such a date,
And saw there such and such a sight.
You'll think it all occurr'd to you—'



On this, both, weeping, bade adieu.
Away the lonely wanderer flew. –



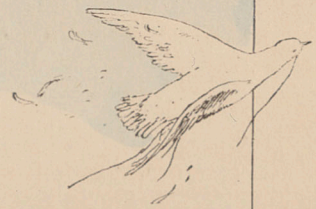
A thunder-cloud began to lower;
He sought, as shelter from the shower,
The only tree that graced the plain,
Whose leaves ill turn'd the pelting rain.



And, lighting on a ruin'd wall,
Believed his dangers ended all.
A roguish boy had there a sling,
(Age pitiless!
We must confess,)
And, by a most unlucky fling,
Half killed our hapless dove;

The sky once more serene above,
On flew our drench'd and dripping dove,
And dried his plumage as he could.
Next, on the borders of a wood,
He spied some scatter'd grains of wheat,
Which one, he thought, might safely eat;
For there another dove he saw—
He felt the snare around him draw!
This wheat was but a treacherous bait
To lure poor pigeons to their fate.
The snare had been so long in use,
With beak and wings he struggled loose:
Some feathers perish'd while it stuck;

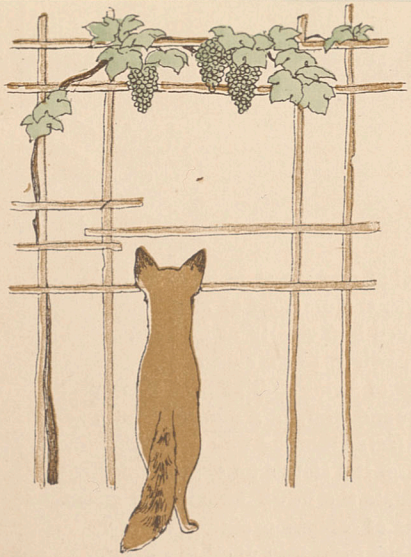
Who now, no more in love
With foreign travelling,
And lame in leg and wing,
Straight homeward urged his crippled flight,
Fatigued, but glad, arrived at night,
In truly sad and piteous plight.



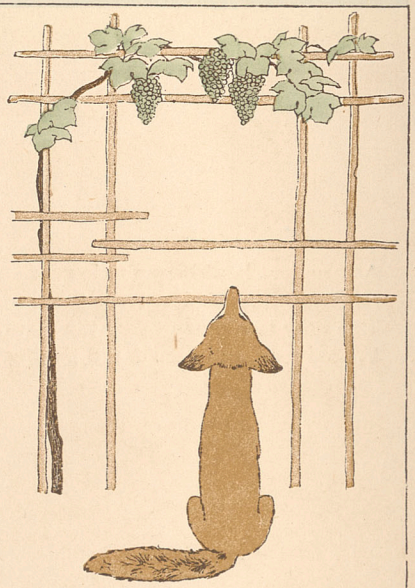
But, what was worst in point of luck,
A hawk, the cruellest of foes,
Perceived him clearly as he rose,
Off dragging, like a runaway,
A piece of string. The bird of prey
Had bound him, in a moment more,
Much faster than he was before,
But from the clouds an eagle came,
And made the hawk himself his game.
By war of robbers profiting,
The dove for safety plied the wing,

The doves rejoin'd, I leave you all to say,
What pleasure might their pains repay.

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES



A Fox, almost with hunger dying,
Some grapes upon a trellis spying,
To all appearance ripe, clad in
Their tempting russet skin,



Most gladly would have eat them;

But since he could not get them,
So far above his reach the vine—

'They're sour,' he said; 'such grapes as these,
The dogs may eat them if they please!'
Did he not better than to whine?

THE MILLER, HIS SON AND THE ASS

'A miller and his son, I've somewhere read,
The first in years, the other but a lad,—

A fine, smart boy, however, I should say,—
To sell their ass went to a fair one day.
In order there to get the highest price,
They needs must keep their donkey fresh and nice;
So, tying fast his feet, they swung him clear,
And bore him hanging like a chandelier.

Alas! poor, simple-minded country fellows!
The first that sees their load, loud laughing, bellows,
"What farce is this to split good people's sides?
The most an ass is not the one that rides!"

The miller, much enlighten'd by this talk,
Untied his precious beast, and made him walk.
The ass, who liked the other mode of travel,
Bray'd some complaint at trudging on the gravel;

Whereat, not understanding well the beast,
The miller caused his hopeful son to ride,
And walk'd behind, without a spark of pride.

Three merchants pass'd, and' mightily displeased
The eldest of these gentlemen cried out,
"Ho there! dismount, for shame, you lubber lout
Nor make a foot-boy of your grey-beard sire:
Cnange places, as the rights of age require."

'To please you, sirs," the miller said, "I ought.
So down the young and up the old man got.

Three girls next passing, "What a shame!" says one.
"That boy should be obliged on foot to run,
While that old chap, upon his ass astride,
Should play the calf, and like a bishop ride!"

"Please save your wit," the miller made reply,
"Tough veal, my girls, the calf as old as I."

But joke on joke repeated changed his mind
So up he took, at last, his son behind.

Not thirty yards ahead, another set
Found fault. "The biggest fools I ever met,"
Says one of them, "such burdens to impose.
The ass is faint, and dying with their blows.
Is this, indeed, the mercy which these rustics
Show to their honest, faithful, old domestics?
If to the fair these lazy fellows ride,
'Twill be to sell thereat the donkey's hide!"

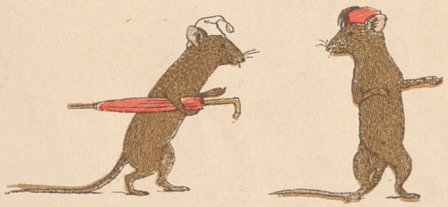
"Zounds!" cried the miller, "precious little brains
Hath he who takes, to please the world, such pains;
But since we're in we'll try what can be done."
So off the ass they jump'd, himself and son,
And, like a prelate, donkey march'd alone.

Another man they met. "These folks," said he,
"Enslave themselves to let their ass go free—
The darling brute! If I might be so bold,
I'd counsel them to have him set in gold.
Not so went Nicholas his Jane to woo,
Who rode, we sing, his ass to save his shoe."

"Ass! ass!" our man replied; "we're asses three!
I do avow myself an ass to be;
But since my sage advisers can't agree,
Their words henceforth shall not be heeded:
I'll suit myself."

And he succeeded.

THE CITY RAT AND THE COUNTRY RAT



A CITY rat, one night,
Did, with a civil stoop,
A country rat invite
To end a turtle soup.

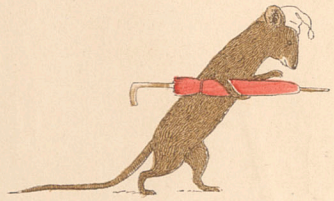
Upon a Turkey carpet
They found the table spread,
And sure I need not harp it
How well the fellows fed.

The entertainment was
A truly noble one;
But some unlucky cause
Disturb'd it when begun.

It was a slight rat-tat,
That put their joys to rout;
Out ran the city rat;
His guest, too, scamper'd out.

Our rats but fairly quit,
The fearful knocking ceased,
'Return we,' cried the cit,
To finish there our feast.

'No,' said the rustic rat;
'To-morrow dine with me.
I'm not offended at
Your feast so grand and free,—



'For I've no fare resembling;
But then I eat at leisure,
And would not swap, for pleasure
So mix'd with fear and trembling.'

THE FOX WITH HIS TAIL CUT OFF

A CUNNING old fox, of plundering habits,
Great crauncher of fowls, great catcher of rabbits,
Whom none of his sort had caught in a nap,
Was finally caught in somebody's trap.
By luck he escaped, not wholly and hale,
For the price of his luck was the loss of his tail.
Escaped in this way, to save his disgrace,
He thought to get others in similar case.

One day that the foxes in council were met,
'Why wear we,' said he, 'this cumbering weight,
Which sweeps in the dirt whererer it goes?

Pray tell me its use, if any one knows.
If the council will take my advice,
We shall dock off our tails in a trice.'
'Your advice may be good,' said one on the ground;
'But, ere I reply, pray turn yourself round.'

Whereat such a shout from the council was heard,
Poor bob-tail, confounded, could say not a word.
To urge the reform would have wasted his breath.
Long tails were the mode till the day of his death.

THE WOLF AND THE DOG

A PROWLING wolf, whose shaggy skin
(So strict the watch of dogs had been)
Hid little but his bones,
Once met a mastiff dog astray.

A prouder, fatter, sleeker Tray,
No human mortal owns.
Sir Wolf in famish'd plight,
Would fain have made a ration
Upon his fat relation;
But then he first must fight;

And well the dog seem'd able
To save from wolfish table
His carcass snug and tight;

So, then, in civil conversation
The wolf express'd his admiration
Of Tray's fine case.

Said Tray, politely,
'Yourself, good sir, may be as sightly;
Quit but the woods, advised by me,
For all your fellows here, I see,
Are shabby wretches, lean and gaunt,

Belike to die of haggard want.
With such a pack, of course it follows.
One fights for every bit he swallows.
Come, then, with me, and share
On equal terms our princely fare.'

'But what with you
Has one to do?'
Inquires the wolf. 'Light work indeed,'
Replies the dog; 'you only need
To bark a little now and then,
To fawn on friends that come or go forth,
Your master please, and so forth;

For which you have to eat
All sorts of well-cook'd meat—
Cold pullets, pigeons, savoury messes—
Besides unnumber'd fond caresses.'

The wolf, by force of appetite,
Accepts the terms outright,
Tears glistening in his eyes.

But faring on, he spies
A gall'd spot on the mastiff's neck.
'What's that?' he cries. 'O, nothing but a speck.'
'A speck?' 'Aye, ay; 'tis not enough to pain me;

Perhaps the collar's mark by which they chain me.'
'Chain! chain you! What! run you not, then,
Just where you please, and when?'
'Not always, sir; but what of that?'

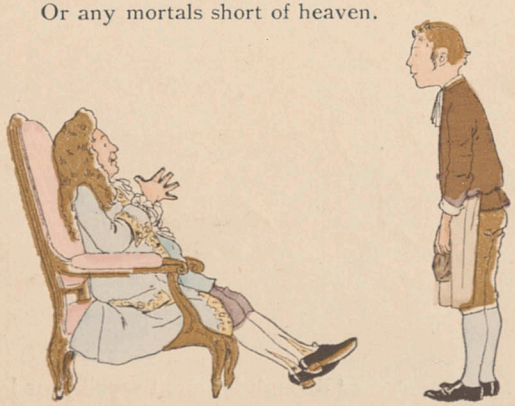
'Enough for me, to spoil your fat!
It ought to be a precious price
Which could to servile chains entice;
For me, I'll shun them while I've wit.'
So ran Sir Wolf, and runneth yet.

THE COBBLER AND THE FINANCIER

A COBBLER sang from morn till night;
'Twas sweet and marvellous to hear:
His trills and quavers told the ear
Of more contentment and delight,
Enjoy'd by that laborious wight,
Than e'er enjoy'd the sages seven,
Or any mortals short of heaven.

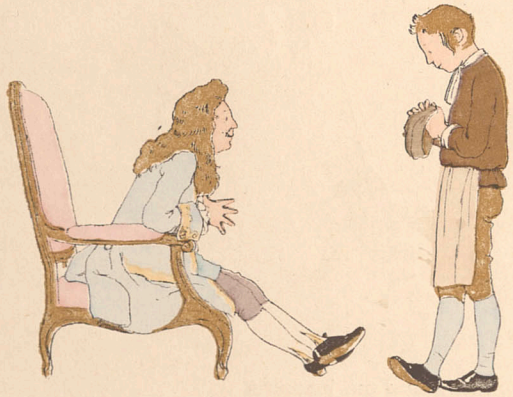
His neighbour, on the other hand,
With gold in plenty at command,
But little sang, and slumber'd less—
A financier of great success.

If e'er he dozed, at break of day,
The cobbler's song drove sleep away;
And much he wish'd that Heaven had made
Sleep a commodity of trade,
In market sold, like food and drink,
So much an hour, so much a wink.



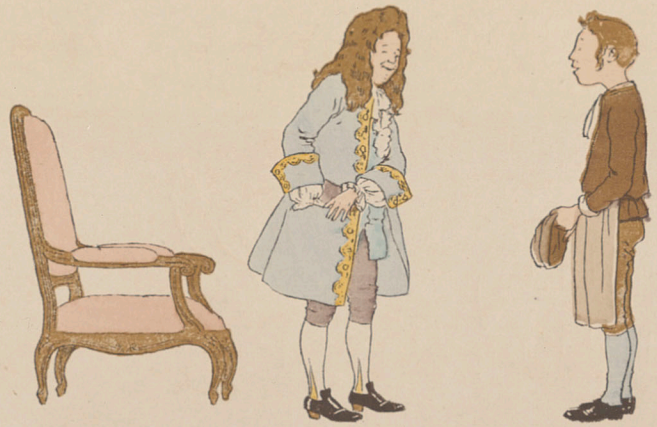
At last, our songster did he call
To meet him in his princely hall.
Said he, 'Now, honest Gregory,
What may your yearly earnings be?'

'My yearly earnings! faith, good sir,
I never go, at once, so far,'
The cheerful cobbler said,
And queerly scratch'd his head,—
'I never reckon in that way,
But cobble on from day to day,
Content with daily bread.'



'Indeed! Well, Gregory, pray,
What may your earnings be per day?'

'Why, sometimes more and sometimes less.
The worst of all, I must confess,
(And but for which our gains would be
A pretty sight, indeed, to see,)
Is that the days are made so many
In which we cannot earn a penny—
The sorest ill the poor man feels :
They tread upon each other's heels,
Those idle days of holy saints !



With smiles provoked by these complaints,
Replied the lordly financier,
'I'll give you better cause to sing.

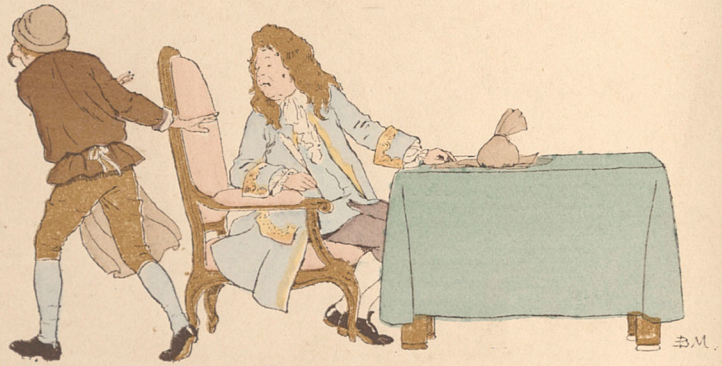
These hundred pounds I hand you here
Will make you happy as a king.
Go, spend them with a frugal heed;
They'll long supply your every need.'

The cobbler thought the silver more
Than he had ever dream'd before
The mines for ages could produce,
Or world, with all its people, use.

He took it home, and there did hide—
And with it laid his joy aside.

No more of song, no more of sleep,
But cares, suspicions in their stead,
And false alarms, by fancy fed.

His eyes and ears their vigils keep,
And not a cat can tread the floor
But seems a thief slipp'd through the door.



At last, poor man!
Up to the financier he ran,—
Then in his morning nap profound:
'O, give me back my song,' cried he,
'And sleep, that used so sweet to be,
And take the money, every pound!'

THE RAVEN WISHING TO IMITATE THE EAGLE

The bird of Jove bore off a mutton,
A raven being witness.
That weaker bird, but equal glutton,
Not doubting of his fitness
To do the same with ease,

And bent his taste to please,
Took round the flock his sweep,
And mark'd among the sheep,
The one of fairest flesh and size
A real sheep of sacrifice—
A dainty titbit bestial,
Reserved for mouth celestial.

Our gormand, gloating round,
Cried, 'Sheep, I wonder much
Who could have made you such.
You're far the fattest I have found;
I'll take you for my eating.'
And on the creature bleating
He settled down.

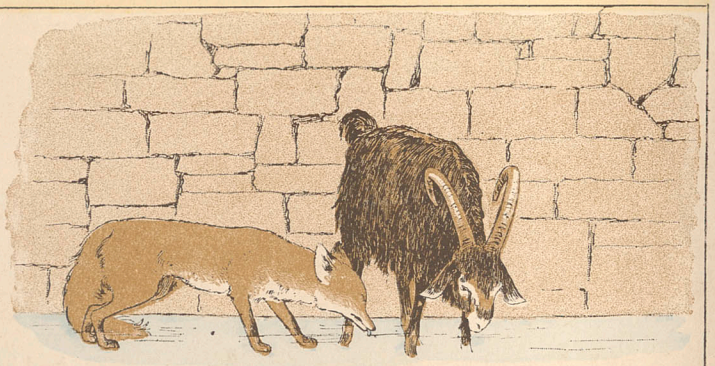
Now, sooth to say,
This sheep would weigh
More than a cheese;
And had a fleece
Much like that matting famous
Which graced the chin of Polyphemus;

So fast it clung to every claw,
It was not easy to withdraw.
The shepherd came, caught, caged, and, to their joy,

Gave croaker to his children for a toy.

THE FOX AND THE GOAT

A FOX once journey'd, and for company
A certain bearded, horned goat had he;
Which goat no further than hise nose could see.
The fox was deeply versed in trickery.



These travellers did thirst compel
To seek the bottom of a well.
There, having drunk enough for two,

Says, fox, 'My friend, what shall we do?
'Tis time that we were thinking
Of something else than drinking.

Raise you your feet upon the wall,
And stick your horns up straight and tall;

Then up your back I'll climb with ease,
And draw you after, if you please.'
'Yes, by my beard,' the other said,
'Tis just the thing. I like a head
Well stock'd with sense, like thine.
Had it been left to mine,
I do confess,
I never should have thought of this.'
So Renard clamber'd out,
And, leaving there the goat,
Discharged his obligations
By preaching thus on patience :—

'Had Heaven put sense thy head within,
To match the beard upon thy chin,
Thou wouldst have thought a bit,
Before descending such a pit.
I'm out of it; good bye:
With prudent effort try
Yourself to extricate.
For me, affairs of state
Permit me not to wait.'
Whatever way you wend,
Consider well the end.

THE FROG AND THE RAT

THEY to bamboozle are inclined,
Saith Merlin, who bamboozled are.
The word, though rather unrefined,
Has yet an energy we ill can spare;
So by its aid I introduce my tale.
A well-fed rat, rotund and hale,

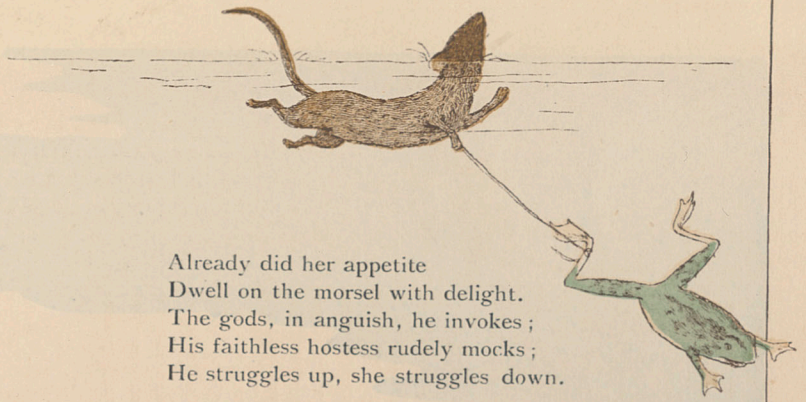
Not knowing either Fast or Lent,
Disporting round a frog-pond went

A frog approach'd, and, with a friendly greeting,
Invited him to see her at her home,
And pledged a dinner worth his eating,—
To which the rat was nothing loath to come.
Of words persuasive there was little need:

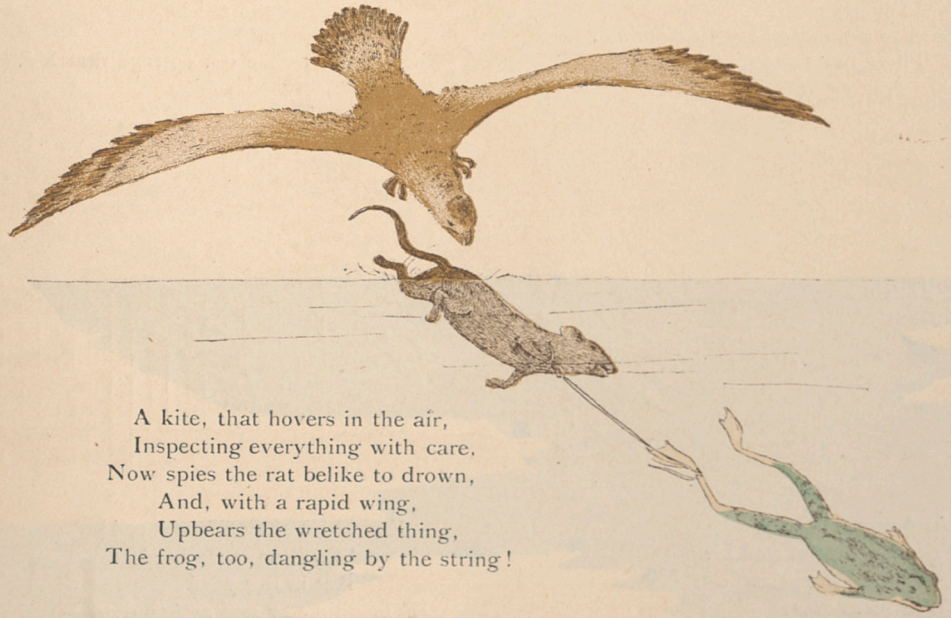
She spoke, however, of a grateful bath;
Of sports and curious wonders on their path;
Of rarities of flower, and rush, and reed:
One day he would recount with glee
To his assembled progeny
The various beauties of these places,
The customs of the various races,
And laws that sway the realms aquatic,
(She did not mean the hydrostatic!)

One thing alone the rat perplex'd,—
He was but moderate as a swimmer.
The frog this matter nicely fix'd
By kindly lending him her
Long paw, which with a rush she tied
To his; and off they started, side by side.

Arrived upon the lakelet's brink,
There was but little time to think.
The frog leap'd in, and almost brought her
Bound guest to land beneath the water.
Perfidious breach of law and right!
She meant to have a supper warm
Out of his sleek and dainty form.



Already did her appetite
Dwell on the morsel with delight.
The gods, in anguish, he invokes;
His faithless hostess rudely mocks;
He struggles up, she struggles down.



A kite, that hovers in the air,
Inspecting everything with care,
Now spies the rat belike to drown,
And, with a rapid wing,
Upbears the wretched thing,
The frog, too, dangling by the string!

The joy of such a double haul
Was to the hungry kite not small.
It gave him all that he could wish—
A double meal of flesh and fish.

THE DAIRYWOMAN AND THE POT OF MILK

A POT of milk upon her cushion'd crown,
Good Peggy hasten'd to the market town;
Short clad and light, with speed she went,
Not fearing any accident;

Indeed, to be the nimbler tripper,
Her dress that day,
The truth to say,
Was simple petticoat and slipper.
And, thus bedight,
Good Peggy, light,—

Her gains already counted,—
Lait out the cash
At single dash,
Which to a hundred eggs amounted.
Three nests she made,

Which, by the aid
Of diligence and care were hatch'd.
'To raise the chicks,
I'll easy fix,'
Said she, 'beside our cottage thatch'd.

The fox must get
More cunning yet,
Or leave enough to buy a pig.
With little care

And any fare
He'll grow quite fat and big:
And then the price
Will be so nice,

For which the pork will sell!
'Twill go quite hard
But in our yard
I'll bring a cow and calf to dwell—

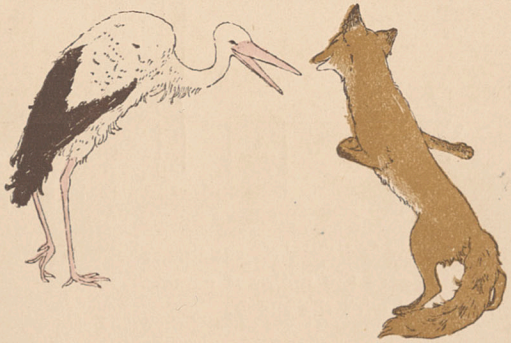
A calf to frisk among the flock!'

The thought made Peggy do the same;
And down at once the milk-pot came,
And perish'd with the shock.

Calf, cow, and pig, and chicks, adieu!
Your mistress' face is sad to view;
She gives a tear to fortune spilt;

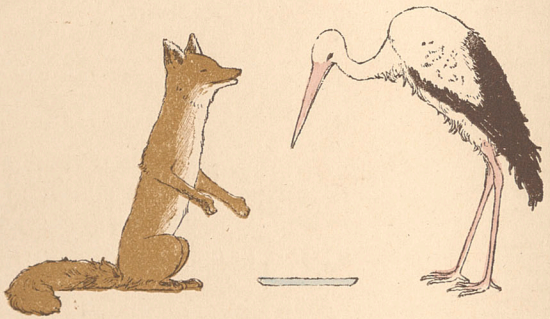
Then with the downcast look of guilt
Home to her husband empty goes,
Somewhat in danger of his blows.

THE FOX AND THE STORK

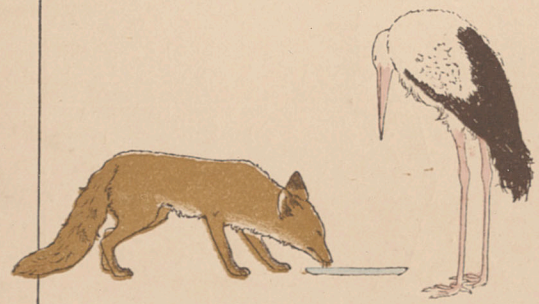


Old Mister Fox was at expense, one day,
To dine old Mistress Stork.

The fare was light, was nothing, sooth to say,
Requiring knife and fork.
That sly old gentleman, the dinner-giver,
Was, you must understand, a frugal liver.



This once, at least, the total matter
Was thinnish soup served on a platter,

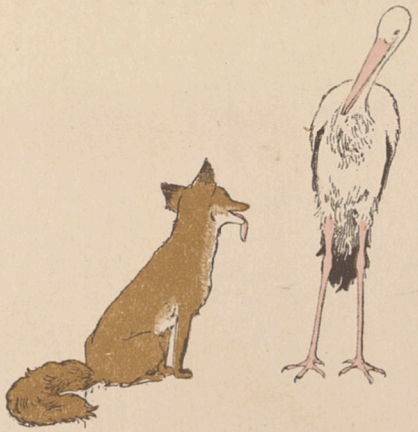


For madam's slender beak a fruitless puzzle,

Till all had pass'd the fox's lapping muzzle.

But, little relishing his laughter,

Old gossip Stork, some few days after,
Return'd his Foxship's invitation.
Without a moment's hesitation,
He said he'd go, for he must own he
Ne'er stood with friends for ceremony.



And so, precisely at the hour,
He hied him to the lady's bower;
Where, praising her politeness,
He finds her dinner right nice.

Its punctuality and plenty,
Its viands, cut in mouthfuls dainty,
Its fragrant smell, were powerful to excite,
Had there been need, his foxish appetite.
But now the dame, to torture him,
Such wit was in her,
Served up her dinner
In vases made so tall and slim,

They let their owner's beak pass in and out,
But not, by any means, the fox's snout!

All arts tried without avail,
With drooping head and tail,
As ought a fox a fowl had cheated,
The hungry guest at last retreated.

Ye knaves, for you is this recital,
You'll often meet Dame Stork's requital.

THE FOOL AND THE SAGE

A FOOL pursued, with club and stone.
A sage, who said, 'My friend well done!

Receive this guinea for your pains;
They well deserve far higher gains,
The workman's worthy of his hire,

'Tis said. There comes a wealthy squire,
Who hath wherewith thy works to pay;
To him direct thy gifts, and they
Shall gain their proper recompense.'

Urged by the hope of gain,
Upon the wealthy citizen
The fool repeated the offence.

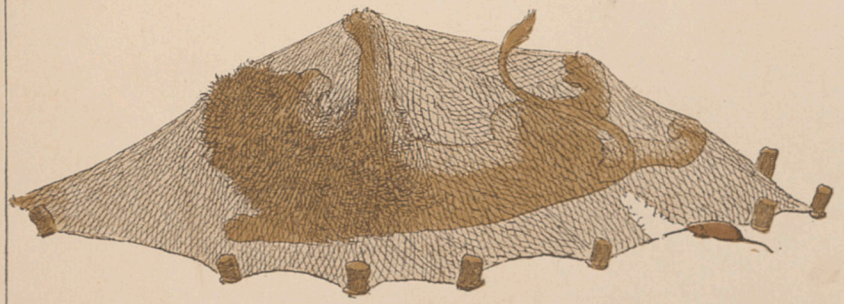
His pay this time was not in gold.
Upon the witless man
A score of ready footmen ran,
And on his back, in full, his wages told.

THE LION AND THE RAT

To show to all your kindness, it behoves :
There's none so small but you his aid may need.
I quote two fables for this weighty creed,
Which either of them fully proves.

From underneath the sward
A rat, quite off his guard,
Peep'd out between a lion's paws.

The beast of royal bearing
Show'd what a lion was
The creature's life by sparing—
A kindness well repaid ;
For, little as you would have thought
His majesty would ever need his aid,
It proved full soon
A precious boon.



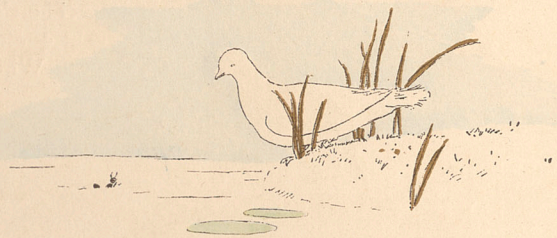
Forth issuing from his forest glen,
T' explore the haunts of men,
In lion-net his majesty was caught,
From which his strength and rage
Served not to disengage.
The rat ran up, with grateful glee,
Gnaw'd off a rope, and set him free.

By time and toil we sever
What strength and rage could never.

THE DOVE AND THE ANT

THE same instruction we may get
From another couple, smaller yet.

A dove came to a brook to drink,
When, leaning o'er its crumbling brink,



An ant fell in, and vainly tried,
In this, to her, an ocean tide.
To reach the land; whereat the dove,

With every living thing in love,
Was prompt a spire of grass to throw her,

By which the ant regain'd the shore.

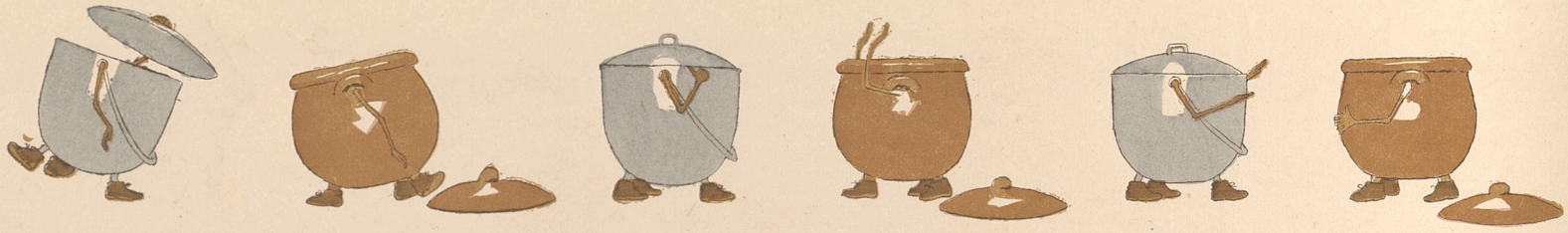
A barefoot scamp, both mean and sly,
Soon after chanced this dove to spy;
And, being arm'd with bow and arrow,

The hungry codger doubted not
The bird of Venus, in his pot,
Would make a soup before the morrow.

Then as his deadly bow he drew,
Our ant just bit his heel.

Roused by the villain's squeal,
The dove took timely hint, and flew
Far from the rascal's coop;—
And with her flew his soup.

THE EARTHEN POT AND THE IRON POT



An iron pot proposed
To an earthen pot a journey.

The latter was opposed,
Expressing the concern he
Had felt about the danger
Of going out a ranger.

He thought the kitchen hearth
The safest place on earth
For one so very brittle.
'For thee, who art a kettle,
And hast a tougher skin,
There's nought to keep thee in.'

'I'll be thy body-guard,'
Replied the iron pot;
'If anything that's hard
Should threaten thee a jot,
Between you I will go,
And save thee from the blow.'

This offer him persuaded.
The iron pot paraded
Himself as guard and guide
Close at his cousin's side.

Now, in their tripod way,
They hobble as they may;
And eke together bolt
At every little jolt,—
Which gives the crockery pain;

But presently hiss comrade hits
So hard, he dashes him to bits,
Before he can complain.

Take care that you associate
With equals only, lest your fate
Between these pots should find its mate.

THE BEAR AND THE TWO COMPANIONS

Two fellows, needing funds, and bold,
A bearskin to a furrier sold,
Of which the bear was living still,
But which they presently would kill—
  At least they said they would.
  And, if their word was good,

(In their account 'twas theirs,
  But in his own, the bears.)
By bargain struck upon the skin,
Two days at most must bring it in.

It was a king of bears—an Ursa Major—
  The biggest bear beneath the sun.
Its skin, the chaps would wager,
  Was cheap at double cost;
  'Twould make one laugh at frost—
  And make two robes as well as one.
Old Dindenaut, in sheep who dealt,
Less prized his sheep, than they their pelt—

Forth went the two.

More easy found than got,
The bear came growling at them on the trot.
Behold our dealers both confounded,
As if by thunderbolt astounded!
Their bargain vanish'd suddenly in air;
For who could plead his interest with a bear?
One of the friends sprang up a tree;

The other, cold as ice could be,
Fell on his face, feign'd death,
And closely held his breath,—
He having somewhere heard it said
The bear ne'er preys upon the dead.

Sir Bear, sad blockhead, was deceived—
The prostrate man a corpse believed;
But, half suspecting some deceit,
He feels and snuffs from head to feet,
And in the nostrils blows.

The boy's surely dead, he thinks.
'I'll leave it,' says he, 'for it stinks;'

And off into the woods he goes.

The other dealer, from his tree
Descending cautiously, to see

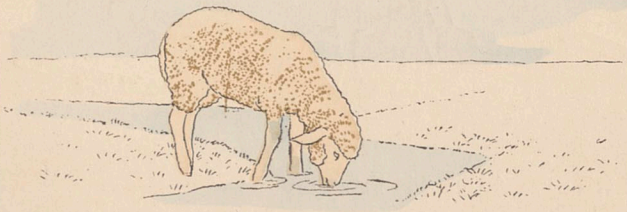
His comrade lying in the dirt,

Consoling, says, 'It is a wonder
That, by the monster forced asunder,
We're, after all, more scared than hurt.

But,' addeth he, 'what of the creature's skin?
He held his muzzle very near;
What did he whisper in your ear?'
'He gave this caution,—"Never dare
Again to sell the skin of bear
Its owner has not ceased to wear."'

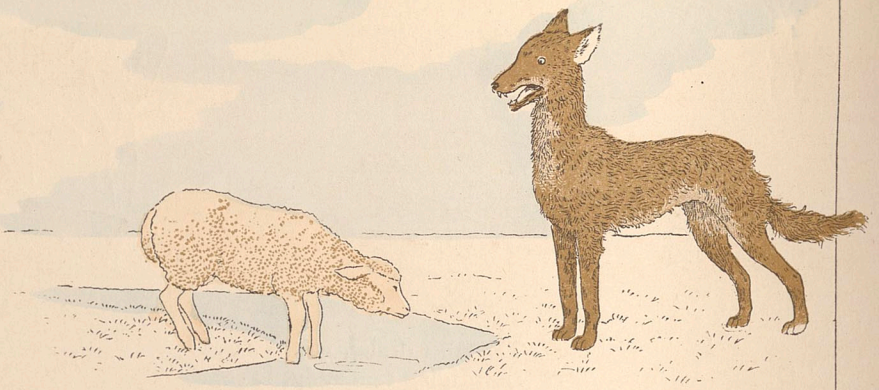
THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

THAT innocence is not a shield,
A story teaches, not the longest.
The strongest reasons always yield
To reasons of the strongest.



A lamb her thirst was slaking,
Once, at a mountain rill.

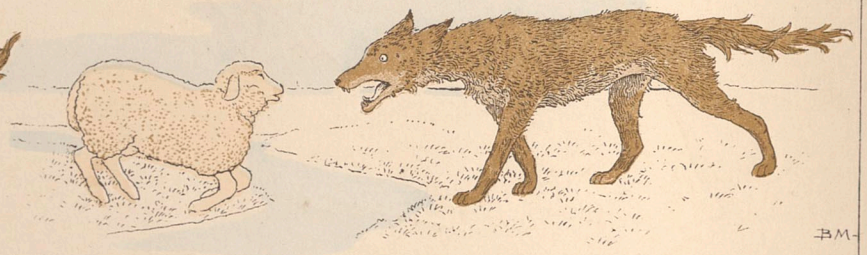
A hungry wolf was taking
His hunt for sheep to kill,



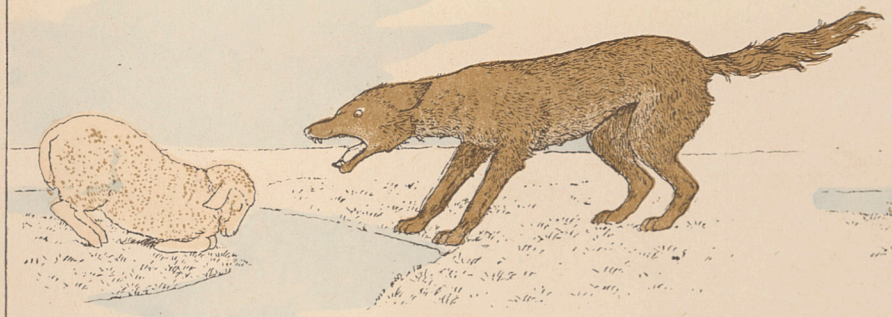
When, spying on the streamlet's brink
This sheep of tender age,
He howl'd in tones of rage,
'How dare you soil my drink?
Your impudence I shall chastise!'

'Let not your majesty,' the lamb replies,
'Decide in haste or passion!
For sure 'tis difficult to think
In what respect or fashion
My drinking here could soil your drink,

Since on the stream your majesty now faces
I'm lower down, full twenty paces.'



'You soil it,' said the wolf; 'and, more, I know
You cursed and slander'd me a year ago.'
'O no! how could I such a thing have done!
A lamb that has not seen a year,
A suckling of its mother dear?'



'Your brother then.' 'But brother I have none.'

'Well, well, what's all the same,
'Twas some one of your name.
Sheep, men, and dogs of every nation,
Are wont to stab my reputation,

As I have truly heard.'
Without another word,
He made his vengeance good,—
Bore off the lambkin to the wood,
And there, without a jury,
Judged, slew, and ate her in his fury.

THE OYSTER AND THE LITIGANTS

Two pilgrims on the sand espied
An oyster thrown up hy the tide.

In hope, both swallow'd ocean's fruit;
But ere the fact there came dispute.

While one stoop'd down to take the prey,
The other push'd him quite away.

Said he, ' 'Twere rather meet
To settle which shall eat.
Why, he who first the oyster saw
Should be its eater, by the law,
The other should but see him do it.'

Replied his mate, ' If thus you view it,
Thank God the lucky eye is mine.'
' But I've an eye not worse than thine,'

The other cried, ' and will be cursed,
If, too, I didn't see it first.'
' You saw it, did you? Grant it true,
I saw it then, and felt it too.'

Amidst this sweet affair,
Arrived a person very big,
Ycleped Sir Nincom Periwig.

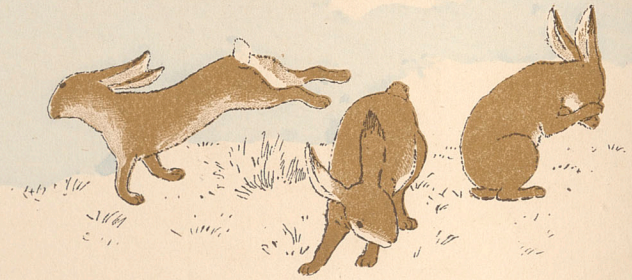
They made him judge,—to set the matter square.

Sir Nincom, with a solemn face,
Took up the oyster and the case :
In opening both, the first he swallow'd,
And, in due time, his judgment follow'd.

'Attend : the court awards you each a shell
Cost free ; depart in peace, and use them well.'

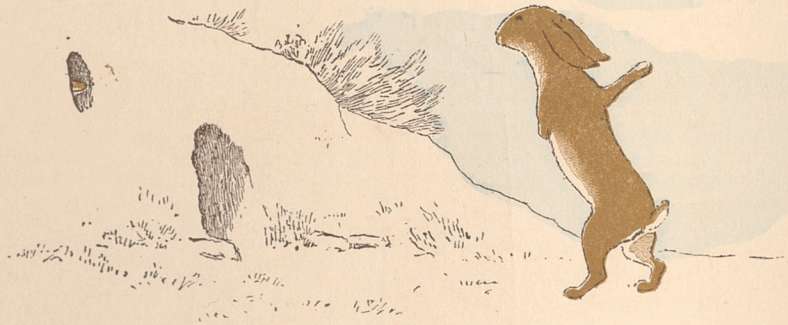
THE CAT, THE WEASEL, AND THE YOUNG RABBIT

JOHN RABBIT'S palace under ground
Was once by Goody Weasel found.
She, sly of heart, resolved to seize
The place, and did so at her ease,



She took possession while its lord
Was absent on the dewy sward,
Intent upon his usual sport,
A courtier at Aurora's court.
When he had browsed his fill of clover
And cut his prands all nicely over,

Home Johnny came to take his drowse,
All snug within his cellar-house.
The weasel's nose he came to see,
  Outsticking through the open door.
'Ye gods of hospitality!'
  Exclaim'd the creature, vexed sore,
'Must I give up my father's lodge?



  Ho! Madam Weasel, please to budge,
Or, quicker than a weasel's dodge,
  I'll call the rats to pay their grudge!'

The sharp-nosed lady made reply,
That she was first to occupy.
The cause of war was surely small—
A house where one could only crawl!

And though it were a vast domain,
Said she, 'I'd like to know what will
Could grant to John perpetual reign,—
The son of Peter or of Bill, —
More than to Paul, or even me.'

John Rabbit spoke—great lawyer he—
Of custom, usage, as the law,
Whereby the house, from sire to son,
As well as all its store of straw,
From Peter came at length to John.
Who could present a claim so good
As he, the first possessor, could?

'Now,' said the dame, 'let's drop dispute,
And go before Raminagrobis,
Who'll judge, not only in this suit,
But tell us truly whose the globe is.'

This person was a hermit cat,
A cat that play'd the hypocrite,
A saintly mouser, sleek and fat,
An arbiter of keenest wit.
John Rabbit in the judge concurr'd,

And off went both their case to broach
Before his majesty, the furr'd.
Said Clapperclaw, 'My kits, approach,
And put your noses to my ears :
I'm deaf, almost, by weight of years.'
And so they did, not fearing aught.

The good apostle, Clapperclaw,
Then laid on each a well-arm'd paw,
And both to an agreement brought,

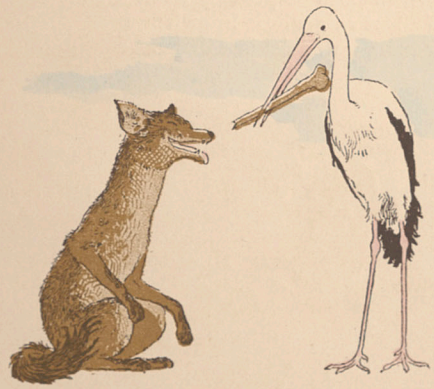
By virtue of his tuskèd jaw.
This brings to mind the fate
Of little kings before the great.

THE WOLF AND THE STORK

THE wolves are prone to play the glutton.
One, at a certain feast, 'tis said,
So stuff'd himself with lamb and mutton,
He seem'd but little short of dead.
Deep in his throat a bone stuck fast.

Well for this wolf, who could not speak,
That soon a stork quite near him pass'd.
By signs invited,

with her beak
The bone she drew



With slight ado,

And for this skilful surgery
Demanded, modestly, her fee.

'Your fee!' replied the wolf,
In accents rather gruff;
'And is it not enough
Your neck is safe from such a gulf?
Go, for a wretch ingrate,
Nor tempt again your fate!'

THE RAT AND THE OYSTER

A COUNTRY rat, of little brains,
Grown weary of inglorious rest,
Left home with all its straws and grains,
Resolved to know beyond his nest.

When peeping through the nearest fence,
'How big the world is, how immense!'
He cried; 'there rise the Alps, and that
Is doubtless famous Ararat.'
His mountains were the works of moles,
Or dirt thrown up in digging holes!
Some days of travel brought him where
The tide had left the oysters bare.

Since here our traveller saw the sea,
He thought these shells the ships must be.
'My father was, in truth,' said he,
'A coward, and an ignoramus;
He dared not travel: as for me,
I've seen the ships and ocean famous;
Have cross'd the deserts without drinking,
And many dangerous streams unshrinking;
Such things I've known from having seen and felt them.'
And, as he went, in tales he proudly dealt them,
Not being of those rats whose knowledge
Comes by their teeth on books in college.

Among the shut-up shell-fish, one
Was gaping widely at the sun;
It breathed, and drank the air's perfume
Expanding, like a flower in bloom.
Both white and fat, its meat
Appear'd a dainty treat.
Our rat, when he this shell espied,
Thought for his stomach to provide.

'If not mistaken in the matter,'
Said he, 'no meat was ever fatter,
Or in its flavour half so fine,
As that on which to-day I dine.'
Thus full of hope, the foolish chap
Thrust in his head to taste,

And felt the pinching of a trap—
The oyster closed in haste.
Ignorance means loss—*Verbum Sat.*

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